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Sannet Bass is a teacher, evangelist and vice president of a women's organization from the Evangelical Lutheran Church

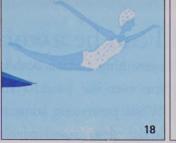
of The Gambia. Bass attended the spring 2015 women's

International Women Leaders program.

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Editor Kate Sprutta Elliott Managing Editor Elizabeth Hunter Editor-at-large Sonia C. Solomonson Editor, Café Elizabeth McBride

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SLOW FAITH

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Losing at Mindball by Susan K. Olson



My daughter and I walked through a museum exhibit on sports, where larger-than-life photographs of athletes of every kind covered the walls. There was a crash-test center where delighted children walloped various sports helmets to measure their strength. A ski simulator tested their budding slalom skills. A computer program measured which sport would best suit each personality. You could push, pull, squeeze, pitch and measure it all. Each exhibit drew a small gathering, but the largest crowd pooled around the one table where people appeared to be doing absolutely nothing. Here was a game where one uses nothing but brain waves to win a race.

It seemed to be the Mindball game created in 2003 by Swedish inventors. The object of this two-person game is to move a ball using your brain waves. Competitors each put on a headband that houses electrodes, face each other and try to get the ball to move across a long, narrow table toward a goal on the opposite player's side. Computer

creens on the adjacent wall map each player's brain ctivity, specifically their alpha and theta waves. These vaves, the instructional sign indicated, are generated when the mind is the most relaxed. So, yes, there is such thing as competitive relaxation.

ut-matched

irst I watched two teenagers face off. One quickly, easy eclipsed the other. That teen then faced off against his mother and won handily. "Moms never relax," someone quipped. Two squirrelly little girls (one of them mine) took a turn. The computer screens showed sharp spikes and valleys as they giggled and whispered. Neither could get the ball moving. Once coached to pretend to fall asleep, they both succeeded. My daughter won the round and asked to face off with me.

I was hopeless—absolutely hopeless. I could not let my mind relax and watched as my daughter joyfully celebrated winning round after round against me. I was somewhat comforted when her playmate's mother did no better.

Why is it so hard for me—for most of us, I suspect—to let go of the constantly swirling ideas and information in our heads? Why is it so hard to just, well, relax? Why can't a mom ever win at Mindball?

I don't think I'm alone with my crowded mind. Waiting in line at the grocery store, one can see a small army of people wrapped up in their phones, checking emails, sending texts, getting a quick call in before buying the family's food. It's as if those 5 or 6 minutes must be packed with productivity, with *doing* something. I know many people look at phones or computers for entertainment. I'm convinced that just as many see these electronic devices as a way to get more done and avoid wasting the 300 seconds one has to wait for a spot at the checkout station.

It's all good—sort of

These things, the things that I do, the things that we do, are not bad things. They are good things, even things for the common good. We're holding down jobs, managing households, caring for children and grandchildren, parents and spouses. We're serving our churches, our communities and our world. We're bringing sustenance to the sick, giving the neighbor

a break on the lawn care, counting the offering after church. Everything is good. Everything is needed. Everything is important. Everything is a lot.

Everything is, perhaps, too much.

Sometimes I think we cram things into our lives like we cram them into a suitcase. "There's a little room left in the corner, so I can jam in another T-shirt" quickly becomes "there's a little time left on Thursdays at 3, so clearly I can take on another shift at the shelter." But time is not the same thing as space. Everything we do—no matter how good or righteous it is—has a mental cost.

Albus Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* book series has a pensieve, a magical basin into which he can store his stray thoughts and memories to be viewed at a later time. Wand to temple, he extracts them one by one to safe storage in the basin. It's not the first time I've wished that magical objects in the *Harry Potter* series were real.

How wonderful it would be to have a pensieve. I could siphon and safely store all those swirling thoughts and responsibilities and have the rest of my brain free to do whatever it is I need to do—or, perhaps do nothing at all. Because the truth is, we could all use more space in there.

Freeing up space

Since losing at Mindball, I've tried to take the cost of my overcrowded mind more seriously. I'm trying to say no a little more often to those things that I can decline. I'm trying to say yes more often to the life that is now. I'll be honest: I'm imagining a pensieve every day on my ride home from work, and I'm trying to put as many projects, thoughts and worries as I can into that imaginary basin to be dealt with later. I'm trying to let go.

But it's hard. Letting go of responsibilities or even the potential of responsibilities seems counterintuitive. There is a whole world out there that needs to be saved, right? There are casseroles for the shelter, letters to the

senator, cookies for the Girl Scouts, shoe leather for the righteous causes. And if I say no, I think, then what?

I fool myself. If I say no, I free up space for yest Jesus drew away to lonely places throughout his ministry—to clear space for what was to come—to rest. I need to follow his model. We all do.

In the summer, my daughter and I spend most Sunday afternoons at the beach. After church, we trade our Sunday best for swimming suits and flip-flops, and we drag chairs, toys and novels down to the seaside. The waves and seagulls soften and blur the cacophony of conversations and music. Even in the midst of a crowof it feels like we're alone. After swimming and reading and eating too many potato chips, my daughter likes the dig in the sand. She's done it since she was very little. If other children ask her to, she'll put in a little effort building a castle, but left to her own devices, she always reverts to digging a hole. I usually help her. Shovel and buckets fly in the silence.

"Why don't you like to build things with sand?" I asked once, when she was maybe 5 years old. "Ye make such gorgeous pictures. Maybe you could make a beautiful castle some day."

"Mommy," she said, "sometimes it's just mon beautiful to take things out."

I've never asked her that question again. Becaus she's right.

We dig and dig and dig until there's a hole ble enough for her long, lithe body and she crawls in it, knees to her chin, brown sugar sand clinging to he legs. All the things we've taken out are piled hapha ardly around the hole containing the apple of my eye

"This, " she announces, "is a perfect hole."

It is. It really is.

Susan K. Olson is assistant dean of students at Yale Divinity Scholand an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church, US. Her previous calls have included chaplaincies at Wilson, Wesland Connecticut Colleges, as well as Yale University. She lives Connecticut with her 9-year-old daughter.

All I want for Christmas is ewe.





LET US PRAY

Openness as prayer

by Julie K. Aageson

One prized memory

from my childhood is an occasion my mother called "open house." For her these occasions were often part of a dreaded expectation: hosting people she imagined to be part of her responsibility as the spouse of a pastor. Her sense of duty trumped her ever-present anxieties. Open houses occurred mostly during the Christmas season when our home was bedecked with Christmas regalia, and endless tins of bars and cookies, krumkakke, julekage and pickled herring had been stashed away in preparation for the big day.

As an extrovert, I couldn't wait for the hordes to begin arriving. Later in my life, those open houses became the template for open houses of our own: faculty gatherings, baptismal celebrations, confirmations, graduations. All had an expansive sense of welcome; friends and neighbors coming and going; great food, music and laughter; and the voices of people savoring one another's company.

Open houses are memorable for me in part because they point to a sense of openness. Open houses meant wide open doors, fresh air, and a way of welcoming old and new friends and people we didn't know well.

Holding open house in our hearts is to practice openness. Openness is a spiritual practice, a way of praying, requiring us to listen and to be present, accepting others as well as ourselves. Openness may mean that others see all the shortcomings, all the blemishes and flaws that characterize every one of us. We may be critiqued for one thing or another and our open houses may not measure up to the expectations of others or ever ourselves. These are the dreaded risks.

But when we practice openness, we make visible our own humanity. When we practice openness, we show other ers acceptance and generosity of spirit allowing them to be themselves. When we open the doors of our own lives, we make ourselves vulnerable to others.

Openness as prayer is an attitudand a condition of acceptance most of us struggle with throughout life. We're much more inclined to analyze and criticize. We like placing ourselves it positions of judgment where we can care our opinions far and wide. To hold open house in our hearts for all people and at things means space for experiencing our shared humanity, space for God to spear and act, space for acceptance, space to carry one another and bear the joys are sorrows of life together.

Open your doors, open your heart fling wide the windows of your sour Make space for yourself that embrace the warts and foibles we all share. Make space for everyone you meet, welcome ing them and allowing them a place acceptance and affirmation. Make space for God to speak and act, to inhabit you life. Openness is a spiritual practice the can change the world.

Julie K. Aageson retired from ELCA Resour.
Center leadership and now she and her spour write and travel. She is co-author of *One Hop Re-membering the Body of Christ* (Liturgic Press/Augsburg Fortress) which honors the 500 anniversary of the Reformation.









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After her 8-year-old granddaughter worried that she was "too fat," the author responds and examines our attitudes on self-worth as well.

Dear Payton,

You may not remember this, but I keep thinking about the last night of my weeklong visit to your home last April. You were 8 years old then. During dinner, you said you shouldn't eat any more because you were "too fat."

Sweetie, it breaks my heart that you should even say that. For one thing, you don't have any extra fat on your body. For another, even if you did weigh more than what is average for your height and age, you would be as beautiful, loved and valued as you are now.

You are beautifully and wonderfully made. You were created by a God who loved you even before you were born-a God who has given you lots of abilities and gifts: a mind that's bright and curious. Eyes to see, ears to hear, a mouth to taste and talk, a nose to smell and fingers that touch. Legs that run extremely fast (remember the races you win at school?), ride bike and roller blade. Arms that fix breakfast, catch balls and give the best hugs. Hands that can pick up heavy objects or the tiniest seed or pebble you can imagine. You can do physical things such as swim and turn cartwheels-and mental tasks such as your math problems and read longer chapter books. Your brain is positively amazing, allowing your body to do all it needs to do to keep you alive without your even thinking about it-

pumping blood throughout your body, processing the food you eat and turning it into energy, operating all the systems that allow you to hear, see, taste, feel and smell. You are truly amazing!

Others may talk about being fat, and TV ads may make you feel that you aren't beautiful or aren't the right size. But your worth doesn't come from ads, from classmates or from anything others say. Your value and worth comes because of who you were created to be-and by whom you were created: a loving God who sees you as perfect just as you are.

There is not another person on the planet (and never will be) exactly like you. You are one-of-akind. So don't worry about being like other people. You get to be just who you are.

Because your body is so amazing, you will want to take good care of it. Be thankful for it. Celebrate it. Feed it good food. Give it good rest. Fill it with positive, caring and loving thoughts.

You are a gift, and the world is brighter because you're in it. You were created special and unique. God loves you. Your family loves you. And I love you to the moon and back. I think you're just right the way you are!

I will love you forever, Grandma Sonia

We're no different

We don't want our young girls to have low self-esteem. But let's look at our own feelings of worth. Do you worry that you're not good enough, not deserving of love? Do you try to show that you are deserving and worthy by bending over backward to do things for others and gain their approval and love? Further, do you worry that you're less valuable (and loveable) because

you weigh too much, your dress size is too large, your facial features aren't perfect, your complexion has some flaws, your IQ isn't high enough or you don't have a successful career?

If you answered "yes" to any of those questions, you're in the company of millions of women. Most of us feel that way at one time or another (or more times than we care to admit). It's all too tempting to measure ourselves against others, particularly against those who people the billboards, movies, magazines and other media with which we're surrounded—some might say bombarded. They can suggest to us that we don't measure up: size, weight, wrinkles, sagging bodies, gray hair and all the rest of it.

We don't have to be held captive to such attitudes. I love the comment of a young woman who is a plussize and whose boyfriend wouldn't be seen with her in public, "Pretty comes in sizes other than 0." Yes, it does!

The Bible study author says that when she's secure in her self-worth, worry dissipates. She cites verse 24 of the Luke 12:22–31 text: "Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" Then she asks us, "What helps you stay grounded in your self-worth?"

The Bible study also points out Jesus' words in verse 25, "And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" and asks, "How can we help each other stay rooted in God's time and care for us instead of getting distracted by 'wrinkle prevention'"—or for that matter, by getting distracted by size, weight and other externals?

Rooted and grounded

OK, here are two good questions to challenge us—one about staying grounded in our self-worth and the other about staying rooted in God's time and care for us. Rooted and grounded. Those are fabulous images. They come right out of the natural world—not the

world of Botox, wrinkle creams, tummy tighteners and diet pills. Jesus uses such images in the Luke texts straight out of God's creation.

So, what does it take to stay grounded in our self worth and rooted in God's time and care for us?

First, we start at the beginning: our beginning, as we read in Psalm 139:13–14a, "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Here the word "fearfully" is about being in award flow we are made. We hold in reverence this amazing body created and given us by God. We should be filled with astonishment and wonder when we consider our bodies and their intricate inner workings. They should not be objects of our shame or hatred.

The love in which we were created continued throughout our lives, as we hear in Isaiah 43:1b, 'have called you by name, you are mine" and in versus 4a, "... you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you." We are formed, chosen, called. How word derful is that?

So what actions reinforce our ability to stagrounded and rooted?

Some self-worth helps

- > STAY connected to your source, your Creator. Whatever spiritual practices you find helpful (and these can change from time to time), stay faithful to those.
- your part to keep those relationships mutually affirming Avoid engaging in catty, gossipy behavior, reminiscent to those years when we vied for a date to the prom. Be read to leave toxic relationships that drag you down. Sad some have to distance themselves from a family membi whose way of relating is constant carping and criticist Create and keep boundaries—you get to say what behavior you will and will not accept from others.

- TEND to media messages that affirm and encourage you. Avoid those that elicit self-hatred or that fail to celebrate diversity in body shapes and sizes. Remember, your body is sacred; it's a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- > MAKE friends with your Inner Critic and love her into speaking kindly. Avoid a limiting view of yourself ("This is all I'll ever be good for." "I'm not smart enough, thin enough, beautiful enough to").
- LOVE and respect your body. Be astonished at all it can do. Be realistic—at 60 we won't look like we did at 40. It's normal for shape and ability to change. Thank your body for all it does, and keep your attention off the numbers on the scale or dress size labels.
- REJECT ageism, sexism, size-ism or any ism. And reject negative names such as ugly, stupid, fatty—whether those names come from others or from your Inner Critic. You are, after all, called by name by a God who loves you.
- STOP "shoulding" on yourself. It's too easy to tie our worth to our productivity or perfectionism—and add pressure by long lists of shoulds.
- > SAY a daily loving affirmation to yourself such as, "I am connected to God and my own sense of wholeness."
- > STILL yourself so you hear your body and soul. Often we're starving for soul food and emotional nourishment and instead, reach for food. Or we numb out with food. If you deal with an eating disorder, please get help. You need not suffer through it alone.
- > **FEED** your inner longings—your calling, passions and the gifts you've been given.

in her book Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice (Jossey-Bass, 2002), Stephanie Paulsell says of

her daughter: "My dearest hope is that...she will know her body not only as vulnerable but as sacred. What I desire with all my heart is to be able to invite her into a way of living that teaches her, through the countless bodily gestures of everyday life, to cherish and honor her body and the bodies of others. I want her bathing and her dressing, her eating and her drinking, to remind her that her body is a sacred gift and nurture within her a profound compassion for the vulnerabilities of all bodies. I want her to have such reverence for the body, and to know her own body as so deeply cherished...."

Paulsell reminds us, "We honor our bodies as God's creation when we inhabit them with greater attention, for when we are where our body is, we are also where our creator is."

I've been the right weight for my height and age, I've had a few extra pounds, and I've had several extra pounds throughout my life. When I'm perfectly honest, I have to admit that none of it mattered to my feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Sometimes I've bought into the messages that so many of us women allow into our hearts and very bones: We're only worthy if we're a certain dress size (tiny!) or a certain weight (less than the normal range) or blonde or beautiful or ... you fill in the blank. Enough. I've been trying to move past all that in these last several years. Deep down, I know none of these things is the measure of my worth. My worth comes from the fact that I am a beloved creation of God, that in God's eyes I'm beautiful and am "fearfully and wonderfully made." Your worth comes from that, too, dear reader.

And that's the message I want Payton (and my other four granddaughters as well as my four grandsons) to carry throughout life.

Sonia C. Solomonson is a life coach with Way2Grow Coaching and posts daily blogs on www.way2growcoaching.com where you can also sign up for her monthly e-zine. She currently serves as editorat-large for *Gather*. Her granddaughter Payton is one of her nine beloved grandchildren.



FAMILY MATTERS

Emmy's shoulders

by Elyse Nelson Winger

Come November 1st in

central Illinois, the sun will set an hour earlier on golden landscapes and buzz-cut cornfields. Candy wrappers—discarded by Halloween's skeletons and super-heroes—will dance on the sidewalks with the last autumn leaves. Church candles will be lit in remembrance of saints gone-by. November is giving thanks time, remembering time.

As I write my last "Family matters" column, I give thanks for the women of our church who, across the generations, have modeled faithfulness. One woman in particular helped me to understand my place in a "communion of saints" that did not always welcome women's full participation in public ministry. At the time, I was a divinity school student hungry for evidence of women's leadership in my own Protestant denomination. Then I happened upon a description of a certain Swedish-American Lutheran woman given by a once-president of the Augustana Synod, an ELCA predecessor church body:

"Mrs. Emmy Evald, daughter of the third president of our synod, militant leader in the movement for women's rights, world traveler, soul-stirring speaker, missionary crusader, founder of the Women's Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod and for forty-three years its dynamic president, was a maker of history," (Shepherd of an Immigrant People: The Story of Erland Carlsson, by Emory Lindquist, p. 171).

I went digging into archival materials housed at the ELCA. I found someone who set the stage for new genera-

tions of women leaders who would, by 1970, demand and receive access to the ordained ministry of word and sacrament. And so in the spirit of November and of Thankofferings taking place this month (and throughout the year) for the grace-filled justice and community ministries of Women of the ELCA, I offer a hagiography (a saint's biography) of sorts of Emmy Carlsson Evald.

Emmy was born in 1857 to the Rev Erland and Eva Carlsson. She grew up in a family that valued the kind of action and service that she, too, would embody as a grown woman. Her father served as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Chicago. We know from various account that Immanuel was a Swedish immigrant clearinghouse of sorts, and that the Carl son family's home often served as hospice and hospital. At age 13, Emmo traveled with her sister to Sweden, where she enrolled at Madame Fryxell's Semi nary for Girls. Four years later, Emm, returned to Illinois and headed to Rock ford Female Seminary. (Note: In the 19) century, female seminaries were private high school and college-level education institutions for women.)

After her Rockford years, Emmy org nized Junior Sewing Societies, directed the church choir, taught Bible classes to wee ly crowds of 300 youths, and organized local missionary societies. In 1877, Emm was a key organizer of the Andover Youn People's Society, the first youth organization in the Synod to permit full members ship of women (Lindquist, p. 183).

In 1883-at the age of 30-she ma

sastor of Immanuel in Chicago. By 1891, Emmy was involved in preparations for the 1893 Chicago Vorld's Fair. She served as president of the "First World's Congress of Lutheran Women in the World." And in 1892, she and other Lutheran women helped to birth a new phational organization: the Women's Missionary Society.

Emmy also advocated for women's right to vote. In 1895, she gave a lecture before the House of Representatives in Springfield, Ill. In 1898, she was the Swedish-Amercan representative at the National Nomen's Congress in Washington, D.C. In 1902, she represented Sweden at the International Women's Congress again in Washington, and, that time, gave a lecture in the House of Representatives.

Her work did not go unapprecinted. On the occasion of her 80th birthday in 1837, her friend Catherine Waugh McCullough—a trailblazing suffragist and lawyer—wrote Emmy the following:

"...I hope that the women who are present today will remember that they owe to you not only constant help and inspiration in religious and missionary work, but also that they owe to you some of the freedom which they as American citizens experience in our great country."

And yet, this activism was not included in Emmy's numerous writ-

ings for the Society publication, Mission Tidings. In her writings and speeches, she was forthright in her expectations of women's generosity, self-sacrifice and commitment to mission work. She once wrote: "To uplift the womanhood of the world is our task." She invoked Scripture that gave women models and justifi-



Emmy Carlsson Evald (1857-1946)

cation for leadership:

"...I just love to read and read this

16[th] chapter of Romans where [Paul]

so affectionately speaks of the work of

women ... Some have forgotten old eastern customs and the times of St. Paul,
therefore charging him as an enemy of

women ... Who has more endorsed woman's work than St. Paul? Never forget
the woman's emancipation that St. Paul
declares in Gal 3:28: 'There is neither
Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor

free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all are one in Christ Jesus'" (Mission Tidings, vol. 20, no. 10, p. 8).

As the Society grew, women's participation in the larger church increased. In 1907, women gained access to the congregational vote. In 1930, women delegates could be sent to synodical and conference meetings, and in 1951, they could be elected to serve on church boards. Emmy and other Society women were the "firsts" to serve in these capacities. And yet Emmy never wrote explicitly in Mission Tidings about women's suffrage. Still, the connections between women and justice in church and society are undeniable. Religious enthusiasm fueled Emmy and others for the suffrage movement and with this movement came new opportunities for women in church. The trend has continued to this day, all the way to the Office of Presiding Bishop. On Emmy's and others' shoulders we stand, called in our time to claim our voices, speak for justice and uplift the women of the world.

What women and saints in your lives might be sources of gratitude and inspiration as All Saints Day begins, daylight dims and long evenings emerge?

The Rev. Elyse Nelson Winger, an ELCA pastor, serves as university chaplain at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Ill. She and husband, Stewart, have two children, Catherine and Daniel.

've had some rough times the past few years. I have regrouped, started over and then circled back—the long way around—to start over *again*.

During the worst times, fear, doubt and confusion overwhelmed me. It was tough for me to pull away from thoughts of the unfairness of my circumstances. So much was out of my control. I second-guessed my decisions and berated myself for every mistake.

Worries morphed into a running inner monologue of complaints. I'd tell myself, "I work hard. I strive to be a good person. I deserve better than this."

The more I listened, the louder that voice became. Big problems were compounded by all the little things I'd pile on.

When I fall into that mindset, regular activities become major inconveniences. It might mean that I view shuttling my daughter to her activities as a chore. Or I worry that eating a few restaurant meals will put us in the poorhouse.

Evidence of blessings

My complaint monologue threatens to drown out the reality of my situation: The things I bemoan are actually evidence of my abundant blessings.

I'm grateful to have a child who is interested in creative pursuits. It's a blessing to be able to provide her with those opportunities. Likewise, taking her out to dinner once in a while won't break my budget.

In reviewing my average day, the reality is that each item is cause for joy. Even cleaning my disgusting gutters? Absolutely, because a few years ago, I wasn't sure I could even keep the house.

So when that anxious, annoyed voice starts to drone inside my head, I remind myself to refocus. When I view things from the proper perspective, I can only choose gratitude.

Often I turn to the apostle Paul. Immersing myself in his letters to early Christians helps me understand the reality of my situation. His world was fraught with



incredible uncertainty, life-threatening dangers and the knowledge that his rewards wouldn't come in this life. Yet his letters are punctuated by his conscious decision to *be grateful*.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, Paul tells these early believers, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of Govern Christ Jesus for you."

The Christians of ancient Thessalonica could view



hemselves two ways: as "children of light and children of the day" (1 Thessalonians 5:5), or as an insular group persecuted for their religious beliefs.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks n all circumstances." I read this and am humbled. I live n relative safety. My beliefs don't put me at odds with he prevailing culture. Why have I ever chosen to be ingrateful?

A different view

Ultimately, what matters isn't what I'm upset about in the moment. I may dislike the situation, but it doesn't define me.

Instead, my identity is shaped by what I learn and how I act on this knowledge. What I have realized is that when I make a situation about me-what I want or what I believe I deserve-I can't see my way to being grateful. Gratitude requires a big-picture view, not an inward

focus-and an ability to stand outside a situation and view it from different perspectives.

How would someone without a car react to my meltdown over a dead battery? What counsel would an empty-nester provide me when I complain that my schedule is crammed with kid stuff?

Part of that big-picture view is understanding that even if current problems seem never-ending, they're not. A moment passes, and I remind myself that it doesn't have to be labeled "good" or "bad." This helps me see the opportunities for gratitude that arise from troubled times.

My goal is to be fully grateful—always. To remain focused, I reflect on lessons, influences and examples of why it is necessary.

It's clear that my parents intended to raise me to be grateful. They didn't have an easy job. I was an epic whiner; they had a strict "no whiners" policy. I believed they didn't "get me." I was sure that a lot of my problems would evaporate if they'd stop being so different.

I don't mean *normal* different, like acting weird around my friends. I mean *different*-different, like eschewing much of the cool mom and dad stuff that would have provided me a fast track to my concept of acceptable. They ignored a lot of conventional wisdom. They had odd ideas, which they talked about—*in front of people*. They seemed to revel in their strangeness.

Inevitably, this made me different. That's lonely. Scary, too. Most of the time, it hurts.

'You'll be fine'

Mom and Dad were sympathetic, and I wanted to bask in that sympathy. However, they'd quickly shift to how my situation might be better than another. For example:

"Just do (insert horrifying activity here). You'll be fine."

"I'm your mom; I don't have to worry about what everyone else is doing."

"Stop whining."

And "I don't have to be sorry; I'm your dad," was

a reminder that character must trump street cred.

Slowly, it dawned on me: My parents sacrificed a lot to marry. They worked hard to stay together. They wanted a better world for their kids, so they raised up to expect different things. They knew their kids probably wouldn't blend in, so they insisted that was a blessing. I'm grateful, even if it took some time to get there.

In her own way, my maternal grandma also contributes to my understanding gratitude. She's something of a pessimism connoisseur. By her estimation "the bright side" is a trap. Her belief is summed up in a plaque on her stove: "Be careful of the light at the encof the tunnel; it might just be a train!"

As a child, I'd mention graduating from high school someday or other future events. Grandma would chuckle and say, "Oh, I'll probably be dead by then." I understood. Grandma has debilitating rheuma toid arthritis and other difficulties.

Still, I insisted that she *wouldn't* be dead. In my view, my beloved grandmother was and is full of life-sfunny, smart and engaging.

But she said, "I'll probably be dead by then" so often that it became a joke. She meant it. I accepted it even as I scoffed quietly.

Grandma loved my dad as if he were her own. That was another joke; he was her favorite. But he died suddenly and didn't see his children gradual from high school. This left Grandma distraught, and she took my brother and me aside.

The narrative changed

She told us she would stop saying, "I'll probably be dead by then," because she realized it was wrong. Sounded ungrateful, she said. She *would* see us graduate from high school and more.

In the more than 20 years since, Grandma has celebrated graduations, weddings, anniversaries, morgrandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Those years haven't been without pain. Whe

Grandpa died two years ago, "I'll probably be dead by then" returned. Now, she sometimes avoids making plans a few months out because, "I'll probably be dead by then."

She misses Grandpa, she tells me; she's ready to lie. I struggle. I want to relieve her of this sadness. I vant to take away pain. I want her to focus on all the hings that still bring her joy.

Often, I tell her I'm grateful for her close bond with ny 11-year-old daughter, Zoey. Like my brother and ne at that age, Zoey has enjoyed many long summer lays talking, playing and pretending with Grandma.

Grandma is exceptionally creative, fun and interesting. She always made me feel like the most important berson in the world. This was a blessing of my childhood. I'm thrilled that Zoey now has the same.

I'm also conscious of what will come. Grandma will die, and for Zoey, it will be too soon. I believe it's years n the offing; she is spry and generally healthy. When I was 11, I believed she'd live as long as it would take me to let her go. I still do.

The gift of memories

of know Zoey has received the "I'll probably be dead by then" line. At one time, this greatly upset her. Death is Linfathomable to most children, as it should be. Age is immaterial when Zoey is with Grandma. Their time together is what matters, not its conclusion.

Zoey eventually became overwhelmed by the thought of losing Grandma-this best friend. The joke isn't funny, she said. However, she didn't want Grandma to know it upset her, because she understood, telling me, "Great-Grandma says this because she misses Great-Grandpa. I just don't like it."

So I told Zoey the truth: She will attend Grandma's funeral. I can't predict when that will be, and I don't want to. We can enjoy her now. I was blessed to spend a lot of time with Grandma. I grew up believing I'd tell my kids about this amazing person; I never dreamed

our current situation was a possibility. We will be sad. But Zoey will have something special: many wonderful memories of a beloved friend, faithful companion and nurturing elder. Death can't change that.

As for me, I told Zoey that Grandma's death-talk always annoyed me. However, I'm grateful she did it. It taught me that it's OK to talk about scary things. It made me an optimist. In addition, "I'll probably be dead by then" helped me grieve for my father. Zoey was understandably skeptical. I feared that I'd only offered silly pontificating.

On her 85th birthday, Grandma's friend visited. It resulted in several days of laughter. Toward the visit's end, Grandma's friend asked if she had a good birthday. Grandma said, "Well, I had really hoped I'd die on my birthday. I thought that would have wrapped it up nicely."

Panicked, I tried to think of something I could say. I wanted to acknowledge her feelings and point out there are those who would have appreciated more time with family and friends.

In the meantime, Zoey spoke up: "I love you. I don't want you to go anywhere. Who will I hang out with in the summer?"

A brief exchange followed. Grandma softened, though she stood her ground. She also allowed a subject change.

Grandma still talks about dying, and Zoey still tells her what she thinks about that.

Recently, Zoey insisted Grandma just focus on the fun they were having. Finally, Grandma asked, "Well, what would you do if you were 85? That's a long time to live."

Zoey said, "I'd be planning my 90th birthday party. I'm going to live way past 100." w

Karris Golden is a writer and speaker from northeast lowa. She has written "On Faith," a weekly column for The Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier, since January 1999.



I never imagined I'd hear God's call while eating a sandwich at a Sunday school luncheon. Well, it was the day of the annual Christmas pageant and the time of year when Mary said, "Who, me?...OK, let it be done." Still, it surprised me, when during ordinary small talk, the Holy Spirit suddenly showed up.

I happened to ask two grandparents: "I see your family [attending worship] many Sundays, but you are never all here at the same time. Why is that?"

"Conrad," they replied. "Our grandson, Conrad, has autism. Someone has to stay home with him. He

cannot be left alone for a minute. He cannot come to church, because he cannot sit still and he shouts. So we alternate who comes to worship on Sunday."

In that moment, the Holy Spirit flung open a door

Who 'cannot come'?

You see, it wasn't just Conrad. I learned that there were Sunday school children with attention deficit hyperage tivity disorder (ADHD) who did not attend worship due to anxiety about trying to be still and quiet. Joani is a senior with cognitive disability who comes ever

week with a paid caregiver. Julia and Emily are teens with autism who sing in church (not necessarily when we are, but it's good). Jimmy 'Zeke' is a teen with Asperger's syndrome who offers deep wisdom in our confirmation class. We have several youth with ADHD who serve as worship assistants.

As our congregation began to explore ways to make worship more accessible for people with disabilities, people began to come to us. We met Hannah, who has a terminal illness, fears death, and asks me to pray for radiens (I will; we're all aliens somewhere). Nathaniel came for a Boy Scout project and decided to stay and cohead music. Yvonne is a child who comes to support her little brother (Conrad). She is learning to co-lead worship. Zach is a teen who served on our visioning team for a worship service for all of God's people. He comes to church to play the piano for this gathering. Gary lost his legs during a time of homelessness in winter. Mark is a grownup who shares his whole heart. Symphani is a sighila who needed to dance in order to pray.

These children of God, of all ages, have been rentrusted to us. Yet all of their loved ones had stayed

shouted and honest prayers offered (admittedly, with sometimes maybe a little too much information).

It's been three years since we launched "All God's People." Conrad's whole family attends church together now. He's received his first communion, and he is attending school. And this worship service has become a life-giving ministry for our 111-year-old Lutheran church.

After that luncheon, I prayed for help in making this vision a reality. I did not share my prayer with anyone. But over the next three months, I met or was introduced to new members and colleagues in town who had gifts in this area.

Another member of our synod, diaconal minister Susan Lindberg Haley, runs "All Right Ministry," which proclaims that "the Body is only complete when people of all abilities and disabilities are recognized, welcomed and included." She listened to my story and helped evaluate our leadership skill set, as well as our building.

Members of Immanuel, as well as many families who have lived with disabilities, affirmed both the need and our ability to grow into meeting it. I learned that one

> new member, Kathy, was serving as a spiritual director and adjustment counselor in the local middle school. Soon we had a small team,

made up of people of all ages, that met monthly to pray and envision the ministry. Not only church leaders, but musicians, artists, liturgists, whole families and teenagers wanted to help.

For guidance, we read Matthew 22:34–40 (The Greatest Commandment) and 1 Corinthians 12:12–14 (Unity and Diversity in the Body). Team members did some research to learn what other congregations were doing for worship and fellowship with the disabilities community. While these models were helpful, we didn't wish to be limited by previous ideas.

We decided that even though anyone already

not just some)

home Sunday mornings, believing that no one would welcome them. I never understood any of that until the Holy Spirit showed up for lunch.

For all the saints

"All God's People," a special worship service at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Attleboro, Mass., began on All Saints Sunday 2012. It has become our third service on first Sundays, at 12:30 p.m., followed by a fellowship meal. Families come hungry for Christian community and are welcomed, just as they are. We may arrive weary or jaded, but we leave with love shared, joy

could attend our two Sunday worship services, we would offer a third worship service for families who desired privacy and "no-shushing." We decided that a meal would be important for hospitality. We wanted to develop a playful, interactive, ask-questions-out-loud, move-if-you-need-to worship space. We would use skits. We needed a special means of communion for people with swallowing issues or chemical sensitivities. (Note: Depending on needs, some worship places for persons with disabilities may look very different than ours. For example, quiet worship spaces may be helpful for people with high degree of sensitivity).

When, after months of prayer, study and conversation, we invited our church to provide for this third service and its modest start-up costs, the members trusted us and gave their full support. Today Immanuel members continue to be gracious partners.

Slowing the pace

All God's People draws 30 to 50 people of all ages and abilities. It's grown from simply meeting as a third service to a community of people who participate in all areas of our life together. We've learned that God does not make people normal or abnormal, but simply typical and atypical. All God's People taught us to allow children (and adults) to grow and blossom at our own pace. Some need quiet and gentle words, or a skit, to "see the gospel." Some need to be busy helping with worship or dancing with hand instruments. Some need to be gathering the prayers of the people by bringing a microphone to their seats.

With these new understandings, we have reached out to and cared for a diverse, intergenerational group. Some families come a long way to be with us. Church committees have rotated helping to cook and serve lunch. The confirmation class has baked for us. The meal has grown into another ministry, one of providing food for families to take home. We've learned that those who care for family members with disabilities

may have challenges with food supplies, for a variety of financial reasons.

We began this ministry with so many unanswered questions, with our hearts open and a little afraid. We have made some mistakes, and underestimated some needs. All of this has deepened our faith in God's help in the work we share. Our guiding prayer remains the same: Where do we feel that God is leading us, in this placed at this time, with these new friends in Christ? Who are we together?

The impact goes beyond our third worship service. What we've learned in All God's People has influenced our intergenerational model for Sunday school, with an all-ages-together time of learning, playing and praying. We've learned it's alright to experiment. By grace God's people-all of us-are finding a new way of being a church, together in faith.

Sandra Demmler D'Amico is a pastor at Immanuel Luthera Church, Attleboro, Mass.

Let us pray:

of your presence.

Amen.

Setting forth on today's journey, without all of the answers, we tuck a prayer in our hearts and go; walking, running, rolling, with times to rest in silence, and times to dance or shout with joy! O Holy Spirit, you stir us up and move us to new place even as you keep us safely under your wing. We give thanks for your surprises, and for your gentleness, when we are afraid to follow. Stir up in us love for all of your people, especially those who have been forgotten or turned away May we see the Beloved, in all of these. May we open the door, first in our hearts, and then at our table, making ready for the great feast

FORMING A DISABILITIES COMMUNITY IN CHURCH 15 tips from Immanuel members

Create a strong founding team and include children and youth. They have lots of experience with inclusion at school. Ask friends and family to help you reach out. Families came to us via word of mouth from people they trusted.

Train youth as volunteers. They can help you dream about what we are doing together with God's help. Our youth leaders sometimes bring other youth with them.

All adult volunteers must pass criminal background check no exceptions.

Educate everyone about acceptance and disabilities, i.e., no use of the 'R' word (retarded).

Use person-first language, such as "Kathy has autism," not "Kathy is autistic," because Kathy is many other wonderful things.

Assess your facilities for safety and access issues (stairs, ramp, bathrooms, pews, fire code, etc.)

8 Visit others who share this type of worshiping community.
Talk to their leaders, participants and caregivers.

Be flexible and willing to adjust. What may work for one group or for a time may need to change. Your group will

change as children grow older and seniors grow frail. Treatment services may help some to manage disabilities so they can participate.

10 Facilitate relationships and conversations between families and between individuals with disabilities (especially those who would make good friendship matches).

11 People love to eat together. Some who are part of our All God's People community have very few chances to go out as a family. The meal afterwards is essential to what we're doing together. And feeding people is so biblical!

12 Get to know what each person's differences are. Learn how you can make them feel welcome.

13 One stereotype about people with autism is that they can't deal with being touched, so people asked before they would extend a hand of peace to Emily and Julia. This is NOT a problem for Emily and Julia.

14 One worshipper at the All God's People services often needs oxygen treatments during our services. We make sure she and her mother know where she can have privacy for that.

15 Brace yourself for surprises and Jesus moments, every time.

SIX NEW WAYS TO WORSHIP

Shorter is better. Tell a five-minute dynamic story, instead of preaching a 15-minute sermon.

Provide time for everyone to speak. A person leading the prayers can walk around with a wireless microphone. Remember: the Prayers of the People really ARE the prayers of the people.

Use call and response music. Some cannot read or see.

Give people space. Some people with autism and other differences in sensory perception are extra-sensitive to certain sounds. They may want to spread out, maybe in the back of the worship space, or in rocking chairs.

Encourage worship participants to learn to help with the liturgy, "the work of the people." They can do it—with help or in smaller pieces.

Welcome people for short periods of time, if that is all they can manage.

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

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Theme verse

Luke 8:15—But as for [those who fell] in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Overview

"To work to increase our love for God and for our fellow human (and the two must go hand in hand), this is a lifetime job. We are never going to be finished."

- Dorothy Day, By Little and By Little

"Now that I think about it, the idea of *tempo giusto* describes just about everything I do or aspire to."

 John DeMain, artistic director of the Madison, Wis., Symphony Orchestra

In the first session, we heard God's call to slow down and observe the Sabbath, to work and play and rest in God. In the second session, we heard the cry of the psalmist asking God to hurry up, to deliver us from suffering and oppression. In this third session, we will look to Jesus for a third way, one that keeps Sabbath rest while working steadily for change. We will read three parables in the Gospel of Luke that address time yeast in a loaf, seeds in a garden, and people becoming disciples all need time to develop. Well-ripened fruit and well-leavened bread stand as symbols of the reign of God, when all creation lives in kindness and peace.

We will also consider a handful of non-biblical parables, especially from the area of music. The title of this session is a musical notation, tempo giusto, meaning "play at the right speed." This phrase has come to encompass a movement among musicians calling for slower-paced performances. These musicians observe that musical performance has gotten steadily fasted beginning with the industrial era. In the book, In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed (Orion, 2004), Carl Honore writes: "For the virtuoso, cranking up the tempo was one way to

launt his technical brilliance—and give the audience a hrill." That trend is countered by German conductor Jwe Kliemt, a member of the Society for the Deceleration of Time and host of Tempo Giusto concerts. He explains, "It is pointless to speed up everything just because we can, or because we feel we must. The ecret of life is always to look for the tempo giusto. And howhere is that more true than in music."

We are more accustomed to seeing a word like allegro" (quickly) or "adagio" (slowly) at the top of a sheet of music. How do we discern the right speed? Gregory Peterson, a professor of music at Luther Colege, Decorah, Iowa, explains that "the Italian term giusto does mean just or right. It is interpreted as play at the right or correct tempo, which, of course, is dictathed by the particular style and period of a given piece of nusic and following the conventional wisdom applied to such pieces." Thus context, history, place and comnunity inform the discovery of tempo giusto. Right pace is not just a matter of personal taste or preference. Like taking in a concert, maybe living at the right speed is something best taught by experience. Kliemt asserts: It is stupid to drink a glass of wine too quickly. And it is stupid to play Mozart too fast."

The glass of good wine and the beautiful symphony are both like the seed that grows in its own time and the yeast that leavens the whole loaf. Those are images

for the reign of God and its mysterious timing. In their natural way of living, wine, seeds and yeast practice tempo giusto. It is our task to figure out how to bring our lives into harmony with them, how to ripen and flourish in God's time, how to play our music at the right speed. The reign of God will renew and restore every aspect of life as well. The parables of Jesus are a little peek into what that restoration looks and feels like, timing included.

Today and tomorrow: parables of timing

Take three cleansing breaths. READ LUKE 12:22-31 ALOUD.

> Share one phrase or image that stood out to you. List the words that pertain to work of some kind. Now find all the references to the passing of time.

Willie Nelson wrote a song, "Three Days," about the dreadful way time passes when you've lost the one you love. Overcome by sadness, the singer reflects how all his days are defined by sorrow and nothing else. Yesterday, today and tomorrow represent a prison of unchanging time, because his beloved is no longer there.

Jesus addresses the same three days as he teaches his disciples. Through the eyes of Jesus, the passing of time represents not a prison but a promise. He points

A SCENE FROM THE FILM "SIDEWAYS"

Maya: I suppose I got really into wine originally through my ex-husband. He had a big, kind of show-off cellar. But then I found out that I have a really sharp palate, and the more I drank, the more I liked what it made me think about.

Miles: Yeah? Like what?

Maya: Like what a fraud he was.

(Miles laughs.)

Maya: No, but I do like to think about the life of wine, how it's a living thing. I like to think about what was going on the year the grapes were growing, how the sun was shining that summer or if it rained... what the weather was like. I think about all those people who tended and picked the grapes, and if it's an old wine, how many of them must be dead by now. I love how wine continues to evolve, how every time I open a bottle it's going to taste different than if I had opened it on any other day. Because a bottle of wine is actually alive—it's constantly evolving and gaining complexity.

to other beings in creation whose utter dependence on the provisions of God allow them to be fully present in the moment. Lilies, ravens and field grasses neither grieve the past nor fret over the future. In that beautiful dependence, they are free.

In contrast to Nelson's mournful country song, the words of Jesus almost form a lullaby. "Look around you, dear children," he seems to sing. "God cares for you like every other creature. Clothing, food, safety are God's free gifts. Work and rest in this good day." Being set free from worry is necessary for most of us to fall asleep. Is freedom from worry also necessary for good work?

Dorothy Day modeled lifelong hard work rooted in God's love and freedom. Co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, servant of the poor, speaker of truth, and a radical advocate of peace, Day's life combined tremendous passion to engage and change the world for the sake of the Gospel with a healthy perspective that such work would never really be over. She challenged her Catholic community to take seriously God's call to live now as though the reign of God were fully come. And she frustrated her activist friends by the compassion and patience she showed to their so-called enemies. She walked a third way, a Christ-centered way. In House of Hospitality by Dorothy Day and Timothy M. Dolan, Day writes: "I must see the large and generous picture of the new social order wherein justice dwelleth. I must hold always in mind the new earth where God's Will will be done as it is in heaven. I must hold it in mind for my own courage and for yours." She adds, "we are never going be finished."

Jesus advocates a simple focus on the work of today. On the other hand, Day connects her work to a "large and generous picture" of God's work in time. While her scope is much more wide, Day's faith harkens to Luke 12 and communicates a similar trust in God's good provisions. She can hold in her mind the

picture of a restored creation and be freed from worry, just as the lilies rely on God for their beautiful raimens and worry not about tomorrow.

Share with the group or with a neighbor: What causes you to worry? What shape does worrying take in your life? (Loss of sleep? Back pain?)

Take another handful of cleansing breaths. READ LUKE 12:22–31 ALOUD AGAIN.

Describe an instance in which you were able to let go of worry.

Verse 24 exclaims, "of how much more value are you than the birds!" I find that when I feel secure is my self-worth, worry dissipates. What helps you stay grounded in your self-worth?

The life span of the grass in the field is short: Todaz it flourishes, tomorrow it is toast. Do you worry about your life span or about the life span of loved ones?

We are bombarded with advertisements and health claims regarding what we can do to live longer or look younger. Compare the promises made by ads with Jesus' words in v. 25. How can we help each other star rooted in God's time and God's care for us instead of getting distracted by "wrinkle prevention"?

Walking the turtle

Take another three cleansing breaths. **READ LUKE 13:18–21 ALOUD.**

Do you bake or garden? Recall a time when your seeds did not germinate or the yeast in your bread recipe did not grow.

This passage is often interpreted as an affirmation of small things, like seeds and grains of yeast. Consider the teaching with regard to time. Do these verses to us anything about the passage of time and the reign of God?

"Sowed in the garden.... Mixed into measures of

lour," the seeds and the yeast are given proper time to do their work. As images of the reign of God, the seeds and the yeast help us understand that even God's reign takes time to bloom and grow. The Society for the Deceleration of Time seeks to inspire humans to live more like mustard seeds and yeast, given plenty of time to do our work. And they do so with a spirit of grood humor.

Carl Honore describes a particularly playful demponstration: "Using a stopwatch, they time pedestrians going about their daily business. People caught covering 50 metres in less than 37 seconds are pulled over to explain their haste. Their punishment is to walk the same 50 metres while steering a complicated turtle marionette."

Reading about this stunt, I figured people being stopped in the midst of their workday would be angry fand fight back. I worried for the little turtle puppet! I prictured busy New Yorkers or Chicagoans getting off trains and briskly charging on to work, squashing the polittle turtle in their wake and laughing at the thought of the vislowing down. In fact, the opposite happened. People appreciated the invitation to slow down so much that many returned at the end of the day to walk the turtle a second time.

Walking the turtle is a kind of present-day parable, akin to the mustard seed and the yeast. In order to move in time with the reign of God, we need to take time. Yeast, when warmed and mixed with the right amounts of water, takes time to grow and leaven a loaf. Seeds, when warmed by the earth and surrounded with nutrients, take time to break apart so the new growth can sprout. Then more time is needed for a plant or tree to flourish. Rushed seeds do not yield good fruit. Rushed yeast doesn't produce the same quality of bread. And rushed humans...well, what happens to us? Stress mounts; our pulses rise; we experience headaches and fatigue. Some of us fall into chronic suffering like depression. We do not yield good work when we move at breakneck speed. We are healthier and more fruitful when we take it slow.

Good soil, good fruit

Once again, take three cleansing breaths. **READ LUKE 8:4–15 ALOUD.**

Share one phrase or image from the text that catches your attention.

This rich passage can be unpacked and studied in many ways. Let's pay specific attention to the final

CHRIST THE APPLE TREE From Gail Ramshaw's Words Around the Font (Wipf & Stock, 2004)

"Many different trees have been used to symbolize God's life. [An anonymous 18thcentury poet] called Christ the apple tree, 'laden with fruit and always green.' At Christmastime, the evergreen stands in our homes as a sign of Christ flourishing in the middle of winter. The dogwood's flower suggests to some people the cross with its traces of blood. The biblical images of the vine, the mustard bush

and the cross itself are none of them even self-respecting trees, yet all paradoxically are trees of life. For many poets, preachers and hymn writers, Christ is the mythic tree of life, bearing its 12 fruits, a tree beyond nature as our life in Christ is beyond our nature.

But at baptism Christ is the olive tree. Our struggles with the flood are finally over, we have been saved in the ark, and the dove flies to us with an olive branch in its beak. It is as Paul wrote to the Romans: The Spirit of God brings us Christ, the peace that passes all understanding. The peace is achieved not by an aggressive monarch, swaying over subjugated peoples, but by a nurse rubbing oil on an aching body, a Good Samaritan pouring oil on our wounds, a cook preparing the best meal possible with the finest possible oil."

image: the seed planted in good soil. What is the language Jesus uses to describe this seed? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "patient endurance"?

In the summer months, we often hear parables and stories about farming, gardening and growth read at worship. Timed to be in sync with rhythms of planting and harvesting (at least in the northern hemisphere), the lectionary invites us to think about our baptized lives bearing fruit as well. Like verdant fields and fruit-laden orchards, we are also called to bring forth produce. Luke 8 reminds us that doing so takes good soil, and it takes time.

Yet conversations about bearing fruit carry the hidden danger of becoming ungracious. Even emphasizing health and wellness can backfire and sound like condemnation. What if my life is never calm and always rushed? What if I struggle to "bear fruit with patience"? Am I outside the reign of God?

Here is a handy list to remind us how all-encompassing and abundantly gracious God's saving love is:

When we are...

rushed and stressed
rested and attentive
despairing and depressed
fruitful and healthy
barren and weak
strong and centered
and everything in between...
we belong to God. We are beloved.

God's grace is the bedrock of our Lutheran faith and the context of all our discussions about how to live. Our place within God's love is never up for debate. Our capacity to share and live and express that love in daily living is the thing we ponder and discuss. What makes up good soil? What lends warmth and nutrients to us in order that we can be fruitful?

In session one of this Bible study, we examined

Sabbath-keeping as a life-giving practice. I think another er element of good soil is patience. Though Jesus mentions patience as part of the "fruit," it is also essentials in the soil. Poet and mystic Thomas Merton describes the lives of those around him who are trying to make change in the world, to "bear good fruit," but without the good soil of patience:

"The rush and pressure of modern life are a form perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful."

—Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (Doubleday, 1965).

Do you agree with Merton that frenzy, rush and pressure prevent real peace? Describe a time when you have been guilty of trying to "help everyone in everything."

Merton goes so far as to label lives without patience as violent. When we look at rates of depression and suicide, it isn't hard to agree with him. Happy Walkins, vice president of the Spokane, Wash., chapter of the NAACP and pastor of New Hope Baptist Church observes how the speed of life has not helped us to be kind or make relationships meaningful. Invoking the spirit of Martin Luther King, he laments, "After all these years we've parked on the moon, walked the ocean's depths, annihilated time through high speed travel, yet we still have trouble walking across the street in friendship with one another." Pastor Watking clarifies that the cost of our rush and frenzy is paid i relationships. Rather than choosing the slow, awkwar

work of making friends among our neighbors, we specome experts at using technologies that speed up life without enriching it.

READ LUKE 8:15 ALOUD AGAIN.

Open your ELWs to hymn #447, the closing hymn suggested for this session. Take turns reading stanzas one through five out loud in your group.

If find that the movement through the seasons of life in Susan Palo Cherwien's hymn text brings home the idea of tempo giusto. Since all of life is held in God, rush and pressure are superfluous. Even at the end of four days, we can "trust the promise of the spring."

> What images and phrases do you find here that speak good news to you?

As you sing the hymn to close the session, think back gover the other sessions of this Bible study. Recall remoments of insight or times you felt inspired to change. Look around the room and notice your sisters in Christ, and recall things you learned about these neighbors during this time. Think about the months ahead, band how God's tempo giusto can take root among you.

The peace of Christ be with you all.

Closing hymn

O Blessed Spring" (ELW 447)

Closing prayer: a poem

I go among trees and sit still. All my stirring becomes quiet around me like circles on water. My tasks lie in their places where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes and lives a while in my sight. What it fears in me leaves me, and the fear of me leaves it. It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes. I live for a while in its sight. What I fear in it leaves it, and the fear of it leaves me. It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor, mute in my consternations, I hear my song at last, and I sing it. As we sing, the day turns, the trees move.

- Wendell Berry

Copyright ©2013 Wendell Berry, from New Collected Poems. Reprinted by permission of Counterpoint. The Rev. Liv Larson Andrews is the pastor of Salem Lutheran in Spokane, Wash. She lives with her husband and young son, and dreams of hosting a lectionary-based cooking show.

COMING UP IN GATHER

Next month (December) we will feature an Advent devotional by Valora K Starr. Connecting Advent and imagination, she writes: "God gives us the gift of imagining, which gives sight to our faith."

Starting in our January-February issue, a four-session Bible study will explore the book of Philippians. Authors E. Louise Williams and the Rev. Phyllis N. Kersten look at Christian citizenship and Paul's encouraging letters to the early church in Philippi.

A LEADER'S GUIDE

Tempo giusto

A goal for this Bible study is that the women gathered will blend their insights from the two previous sessions and investigate what it may mean to have a faithful balance in life's rhythms. The musical term *tempo giusto* (pronounced "juice-toe") describes this balanced pace. Have fun reading about the world slow movement. You may wish to do a little research of your own, or find a walk-able marionette for group members to try out. You may wish to open and share a bottle of wine or freshly baked bread as you discuss this session. Savor this setapart time. And once again, take all the time needed.

Seeds in the earth

One main image from this session is the seed in good soil taking time to grow. Consider setting the space with seed packets or small potted plants. If you are using this session in the fall, consider doing a service project together as a group planting bulbs that will be dormant until spring.

Exposing untruth

Another goal of this Bible study is to put the loving, patient way of Jesus in contrast with other voices around us. Address prevalent messages about aging by collecting a handful of women's magazines. Invite the group to flip through them and highlight what the advertisements express about women and showing age. Let the group discuss their struggles with self-worth in light of these harmful messages. Reaffirm the goodness of time as a gift from God. Include in your prayers all who despair over body image or age.

Music in time

Session 3 offers a hymn for the group to sing and reflect upon, "O Blessed Spring" (ELW 447). While there may be no "Time" heading among the topical index of hymns in the back of Evangelical Lutheran Worship, the music of our church lifts up a God who works in time through time and across time. Here are a few more selections that will allow your group to sing along with this Bible study:

"Bless Now, O God, the Journey" (ELW 326)

"People, Look East" (ELW 248)

"When Long Before Time" (ELW 861)

What images or prayers are present in these songs: What do they say about time?

Closing poetry

Each of the three sessions closes with a prayer that is a poem by farmer-poet Wendell Berry. Berry has opter for a lifestyle closely connected to the land and it rhythms. If you need more material for reflection, compare the three poems and their approach to time. What does each poem say about the divine? About humanity and creation?

My prayer for every group that uses this study that, in some way, the women gathered can become like the image from this last Berry poem, going "among the trees" and becoming still. Like circles on water may the discussion you share reverberate through liand thought. May it go deep. May it bless, soothe arrangement. As Berry says, the days will turn and the tree move. I pray that this Bible study helps us to hallow the turning of our days and act when the time is ripe.



BOLD, LIKE THE REFORMATION WOMEN

LUTHERAN WOMEN LEADERS GO TO WITTENBERG

by Alix Matzke

This spring, 16 women leaders from around the world gathered in a classroom in Wittenberg, Germany, to discuss Lutheran women from the past.

"When we read about the Reformation, we see how women are strong and bold and how they impact other women," said Fatima Bass Thomas, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of The Gambia

(ELCTG). Thomas knows a thing or two about being bold—she is one of only two pastors in the newly formed ELCTG. "When we go back to our various countries, we can be inspired to be bold women."

The participants came from nine countries across the Global South, including the Gambia, Indonesia, Madagascar, Russia, Senegal, Slovakia, Tanzania, the Czech Republic and Romania. These women were selected from ELCA global companion churches to participate in the second of six Wittenberg-based seminars through the ELCA's International Women Leaders program.

Under the theme, "Lutheran Women at the Cross-roads of the Reformation," the seminars are designed to inspire and empower global women.

"We have learned about the Reformation in books, but [we] have never had the opportunity to see these

places before, especially the house of Luther," said Mame Coumba Faye, who serves as president of a Christian women's organization in Senegal. "I believe in Lutheranism, but now I can say it's a reality because I have seen it. I will speak about this experience to all the women I know, that the Reformation is real and true."

As the women discussed the stories of 16th century leaders Katharina von Bora, Katharina Schütz Zell,

Argula von Grumbach and Elisabeth of Rochlitz, they were encouraged to apply what they learned from the past to their own unique contexts. Kathryn A. Kleinhans, Mike and Marge McCoy Family Distinguished Chair in Lutheran Heritage and Mission and professor of religion at Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa, taught the seminar.

"The stories of Reformation-era women are important," Kleinhaus said. "[They] allow women to make connections to their own culture today—not only to use these women as role models, but also to be able to show male church leaders that the inclusion of women's voices and the valuing of women's work is not simply a result of modern liberalism. It has roots extending back to the Reformation itself."

Throughout the weeklong seminar, participantal learned about the Reformation in not only the classs room, but the streets and churches of Wittenberg They visited the Luther House, worshipped in the town church where Luther taught, and visited various sites the town has to offer. For those in the historic German town, the group of women from across the world was a sight to see. "People were certainly looking," said Cindy Halmarson, with a laugh. Halmarson is area program director for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, ELCA Global Mission. "This group of women was a very visible witness of the global church."



Mame Coumba Faye is the president of a Christian women's organization in Senegal and a member of The Lutheran Church of Senegal.

Looking back, looking forward

In 2017, Lutherans around the world will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation by reflecting on the past and looking to the future of our church. By that year, nearly 100 women will have had the opportunity to participate in these seminars, funded completely by gifts to Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA.

"The International Women Lead

ers program is our opportunity as a church to invest in the future of women across the world," said Tammy Jackson, program director for the International Women Leaders program, ELCA Global Mission. "The time has come for a strategic emphasis on the role of women in the life and development of the church and society...This is our moment to make that happen."

In addition to hosting six seminars in Wittenberg the International Women Leaders program is providing financial awards to support short- and long-term academic training for established and emerging female leaders from the ELCA's global companion churches and institutions around the world. In addition to nine other priorities, *The Campaign for the ELCA* aims to raise \$\frac{1}{2}\$ million by Jan. 31, 2019, to increase scholarship support

Ind educational opportunities for more than 200 women eaders. After completing their studies, these women will eturn to their home churches and institutions ready to erve in increased leadership capacities.

However, the ELCA hopes the program reaches far more than this number of women. That's because empowering one woman through the program means he is better equipped to train and empower the other women in her community.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of The Gambia, this secondhand impact is already coming to Fruition. After returning from Wittenberg, Thomas

ELCTG's nine congregations, for a veeklong gathering where she shared her learnings from Wittenberg. For Thomas' church, these opportunities are crucial for growth.

"We are thankful for the invitation of send two women leaders from our church to attend the women's seminar," said Marget Gomez, general secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church of The Gambia. "[The seminar] is a way forward and an eye-opener for women in

a country where [the lack of] women empowerment is still a problem. For our church, we see women empowerment as a priority for growth."

At the end of the week, the women left Wittenberg to journey home. These seven days will leave a lasting impact on the group. The seminar participants have increased their knowledge, and are ready to implement change in their communities. They now also have a network of fellow women leaders who are eager to support and encourage one another throughout their different, yet similar journeys. Perhaps Adriana Florea, a parish pastor from the Evangelical Church of

the Augsburg Confession in Romania, said it best during the last day of the seminar.

"I take with me this word: solidarity with other women," Florea said. **

Alix Matzke is campaign marketing communications manager for the ELCA.



Adriana Florea is a parish pastor in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania.

To learn more about The Campaign for the ELCA and its 10 priorities making up a \$198 million, five-year goal, visit ELCA.org/campaign.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE ELCA

The Campaign for the ELCA aims to raise \$198 million by Jan. 31, 2019, in support of 10 different priorities, including International Women Leaders.

The first class of International Women Leaders, consisting of six women from four countries, started at three ELCA colleges, universities and seminaries this fall.

In addition to current gifts, the campaign received another \$3.4 million in gift commitments and \$10.8 million in planned gift commitments to the priorities of the campaign in the first year.

In the first year of the campaign, nearly \$45 million was raised in current gifts, or 23 percent of the overall goal.



The Date and the power of small things

by Laura Jane Gifford

Biographer and Catholic Worker volunteer Robert Coles first met Dorothy Day in 1952, when a spur-of-the-moment visit to the Catholic Worker soup kitchen on the Lower East Side of New York taught him a lifelong lesson. Coles found Day speaking with a woman who was clearly quite drunk. After many patient minutes of attentive conversation, Day took advantage of a brief silence to inquire if the woman would mind an interruption. Rising and turning toward Coles, Day asked, "Are you waiting to talk with one of us?"

Day's words, Coles later recalled in *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Da Capo Press, 1987), "cut through ayers of self-importance, a lifetime of bourgeois privilege, and scraped the hard bone of pride." With one simple question, Day conveyed the central message of the Catholic Worker movement: people—all people—have worth. Day believed deeply in the transformative power of doing the small things that restore our shared sense of humanity. While Day was a Catholic, her movement responsed something very Lutheran: the priesthood of dall believers. Many people, in her time and ours, look at the poor and see sinners. Day's life and work remind us that we, and they, are both sinners and saints—broken people who also have much to contribute.

Often Day is remembered primarily for her antiwar factivism. While this formed an important component of her mission, perhaps Day's greater legacy stems from the way she and her Catholic Worker movement cared for the least of these." Casting aside boundaries between whaves and have-nots, Day embraced Jesus' commission to love her neighbor on a deeply relational level.

vLeaving, finding church

Day (b.1897–d.1980) was not raised in a particularly religious household. As a child she was baptized in an Episcopal congregation on her own initiative, but by mid-adolescence Day had become disillusioned by what she viewed as Christian complacency. "I felt even at 15," she recalled in 1952, "that God meant man to be happy, that He meant to provide him with what he needed to maintain life in order to be happy, and that we did not need to have quite so much destitution and misery as I saw all around and read of in the daily press."

In her Chicago church, however, Day learned that the poor we would always have with us," and that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world. She saw that the same people who exploited stockyard workers "were smiled at and fawned upon by churchgoers." "I did not see anyone taking off his coat and giving it to the poor," she wrote in *The Long Loneliness* (HarperOne, 1952, 1997). "I didn't see anyone having a banquet and calling in the lame, the halt and the blind." Day desired that all should share in "the abundant life." Finding little evidence of this abundance in the church, she turned toward radical politics.

Over the next 15 years, Day attended two years of college at the University of Illinois and worked in a number of fields, including making her mark as a radical journalist. By the late 1920s she was in a happy common-law relationship with biologist Forster Battingham, an anarchist and an atheist. Yet her very happiness would lead toward an inevitable rupture in the relationship.

Day's peaceful existence in the couple's beachfront Staten Island cottage heightened her awareness that "there was a greater happiness to be obtained from life than any I had ever known." Day found herself praying, and when she became pregnant with daughter Tamar Teresa, she realized she wanted the baby baptized. Day's growing faith, combined with her longstanding identification with urban workers, brought her toward the Catholic Church. "[The Church] had come down through the centuries since the time of Peter," she recollected. "... [The Church] claimed and held the allegiance of the masses of the people in all the cities where I had lived." Day made a painful choice. Forced by church teaching regarding marriage to choose either baptism or Battingham, she chose the church. "I never regretted for one minute the step which I had taken in becoming a Catholic," she later wrote, while mourning the loss of her relationship.

A life of service

Intriguingly, despite her lifelong passion for social justice, Day knew nothing of the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching when she converted in 1927. "I felt that the Church was the Church of the poor," she remembered, "...but at the same time, I felt that it did not

set its face against a social order which made so much charity in the present sense of the word necessary." Day struggled with what she perceived as insufficient attention toward the plight of the masses until 1932, when an encounter with a French immigrant and Catholic visionary named Peter Maurin changed the course of her life.

Day had just returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., where she had been reporting on a hunger march for the liberal Catholic magazine *Commonweal*. Already distressed by Pope Pius XI's 1929 comment that "The workers of the world are lost to the church," Day prayed for an opportunity to use her talents in service of the poor. When she returned to New York City, she found Maurin waiting in her apartment. *Commonweal* editor George Shuster suspected the two should meet each other, and they immediately hit it off. Day would always view Maurin as the intellectual force behind the Catholic Worker movement, but Day's practicality, drive and passion would be the essential elements in creating and sustaining their shared mission.

Maurin was born in rural France in 1877, and served as a lay brother and teacher. Deeply influenced by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 social justice encyclical Rerum Novarum, Maurin immigrated to Canada in 1909. An itinerant laborer and natural scholar, by the time he met Day Maurin had begun the practice of writing what he called "Easy Essays" outlining social problems and practical responses based upon his interpretations of Jesus' teaching. This shared identity as writers led Day and Maurin to found The Catholic Worker newspaper, which hit the streets of New York May 1, 1933, and sold for a penny-which remains the asking price. Initial circulation of 2,500 jumped to 100,000 by the end of the paper's first year, and as the Catholic Worker movement spread, organizations in other cities started similar publications. Articles included Day's coverage of the labor movement, syntheses of Catholic social teaching and Maurin's "Easy Essays."

Day and Maurin understood that their calling a Christians also required a more direct approach that the newspaper. Day wrote for *Commonweal* in 1938 that "unemployment is the gravest problem in the world today," more pressing even than war and peace. More over, she contended, the charity that did exist "is liable to make [the poor] leprous in soul and utterly incapable of working for sustenance or salvation."

Hospitality, controversy

Day, influenced by Maurin, was deeply skeptical of state and institutional remedies for the problems of poverth. As she wrote in 1949, the year her mentor died, "We not longer practice personal responsibility for our brother but are repeating the words of the first murderer, 'Amany brother's keeper?'" She felt that middle class Americans had become secure in their perceived identity as "saints," failing to recognize their shared humanity with those they categorized as "sinners."

For Day and Maurin, creating urban hospitality houses, and farms in rural areas, was a way to practice this personal responsibility. Day told Coles: "Peter [Maurin] and I saw those people standing at corners or sitting on park benches, and we felt that something had to be done, and right away. We never expected the solve the nation's problems, but we thought we ought try to do all that we could do, and we thought that the more and more of us tried harder and harder—well, step would have been taken, and that's what I think the Lord wants from us, as many steps as we can manage

By the late 1930s, Catholic Worker hospitality houses in various cities served 250 or 300 people peday. The big house in New York City served breakfast to 1,000. Though such figures might seem terrible small in contrast to the great need, Day emphasize the spiritual significance for all involved, so that "hop that most sinned-against of virtues would be restored."

As a pacifist, Day took an often-criticized standagainst World War II, but despite several years of has

hip the Catholic Worker movement survived the war ears. Day's movement continued to serve those who emained on the margins amidst postwar prosperity. It imphasized the spiritual importance of grassroots work or both servant and served. "To reach the man in the treet you must go to the street," she wrote in 1949. During an era marked by large institutions and clashing deologies, Day's anti-statist philosophy stood out: "we have been accused of lining up with Wall Street and private enterprise.... But, anarchists that we are, we want to decentralize everything and delegate to smaller bodies and groups what can be done far more humanly and responsibly through mutual aid, as well as charity." The felt big institutions talked more than they acted, the opposite of her vision of Christian calling.

Day remained active in the Catholic Worker movement and in peace and civil rights activism well into her 70s. Her lifetime of activism could be best summarized by these words from the postscript of her 1952 memoir, The Long Loneliness: "We cannot love God unless we

love each other, and to love we must know each other."

Despite finding her home in Catholicism, Coles observes that Day retained a "distinct Protestant side," seeking a relationship with Christ, even as she valued Catholic rituals, ceremonies and continuity. She read widely, finding truth in novels and in the work of Protestant writers such as C.S. Lewis.

Her struggle to reconcile social conscience with Christian practice can serve as both caution and corrective. How do we embody the social conscience of the Lutheran church? How do we follow Jesus' commandment to love one another? Day reminds us that as a priesthood of all believers—of saint-sinners throughout time and space—we must recognize the humanity in others before we can emulate Christ ourselves.

Laura Jane Gifford enjoys helping history come alive for people of all ages. She earned her doctorate in American history from the University of California, Los Angeles. Gifford and her family are members of Joyful Servant Lutheran Church in Newberg, Ore.

WISDOM FROM DOROTHY DAY



"What is really necessary, of course, and it is not easy, is that one put everything [one] has into the work. ...For those who feel called to do the work, if they honestly give everything they have, God takes care of the work abundantly." (Day, "The House on Mott Street," *Commonweal*, May 6, 1938)

"We feel so powerless. We do so little, giving out soup. But at least we are facing problems daily. Hunger, homelessness, greed, loneliness. Greatest concern of the Bible is injustice, bloodshed. So we share what we have, we work for peace." (June 19, 1973, entry, *The Duty of Delight: The*

Diaries of Dorothy Day, Robert Ellsberg, ed. (Marquette University Press, 2008))

"God is closer to us than the air we breathe." (June 26, 1971, entry, *The Duty of Delight*)

"If it were not for Scripture on the one hand and Communion on the other, I could not bear my life, but daily it brings me joy in this sorrow which is part of our human condition, and a real, very real and vital sense of the meaning and the fruitfulness of these sufferings." (June 26, 1971, entry, *The Duty of Delight*)















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RACE NOTES

he generosity of our oremothers

V Linda Post Bushkofsky



Women of the ELCA

is here today as an organization thanks to generations of women who came before us. Women organized first in congregations, and eventually into national women's organizations.

From the beginning, Lutheran women in North America used the power of their purses to answer the call to make a difference. Women's organizations often started as groups that provided financial and material support to the church, whether sponsoring international mission personnel, funding new church buildings, or providing meals to seminarians.

Just as we do today, women then gave generously to the church; but they increasingly supported their own ministries, programs and publications, developed by women for women. We build on that foundation today.

Our foremothers built strong women's organizations, equipping them to make a difference in the world. When you and I donate to Women of the ELCA, that's what we are supporting.

Here's an example of generous women creating legacies through the women's organization. Two endowment funds were established, one in 1916 and one in 1921, to support ministries in Liberia. Could the women who established those endowments have imagined that their gifts would continue to support education and medical missions in Liberia nearly a century later? They surely never anticipated the long civil war that ended in 2003 or the recent Ebola virus outbreak. Yet the faithful women who estab-

lished these two funds made it possible for Women of the ELCA—who inherited these funds from a predecessor organization—to continue providing support at critical times in the life of that nation.

Women of the ELCA holds several other endowments, the oldest of which goes back to 1904. Interest earned on these endowment funds goes to the purposes established by the original donors, women like you and me who connected their faith and their finances.

As active participants in Women of the ELCA, we still connect our faith and our finances in many ways. We give regular offerings when our congregational unit meets for Bible study, service projects, general meetings or discussion groups. We offer up our grateful hearts through Thankofferings, gifts made in response to God's grace in our daily lives.

Our generous giving in *regular offer*ings and *Thankofferings* allows the churchwide organization to provide resources, publications and trainings to women throughout our church.

We also support the *Katharina von Bora Lutheran Endowment Fund* (affectionately known as "Katie's Fund") with gifts that support leadership development, ministry in daily life and global partnerships.

And so, not only do the endowments established by our foremothers in faith continue to bear fruit today, but so do the habits of generosity they planted. How can we build on that foundation for future generations of women?

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Intervene, God!

by Catherine Malotky

Dear God, I remember

when it was spring. The blue flag iris had just begun to bloom over the little pond. The sun was low on the western horizon and illumined the iris from behind. I could tell even at a glance that it was spectacular.

I was tempted to rush by. That little pond was not yet cleaned out from the winter. Maple leaves were moldering in the water, mosquito larvae danced on the surface, and the fish that would spend the summer eating those larvae was still trapped in the basement aquarium, biding time until I got in gear and took on this spring chore. Once the leaves were pulled, water drained, algae scrubbed from the sides, water replaced, water lily placed and floating plant purchased, it would be ready for the fish. But it was not yet done.

And I had to look past the neglected pond to see the iris. What would I choose to see? The work that stared me in the face? Or the wonder of your creation? Would I rush by, convicted by my to-do list? Or pause?

You intervened, God. I know, because I would have rushed by. You gave me this, though I was going elsewhere. You invited me to stop and notice the perfect slant of the sun. The rich purple of the blossom. The buds not yet unfurled, promising beauty for another day.

I will confess I chose to ignore the pond, but it too is a sign of your wonders. Though I know the dancing larvae meanitchy welts later, it is a miracle that from these wiggling, water-bound creatures, flier will emerge. (And it is a miracle that a small fan can keep them away from neskin if I so choose!)

The moldering maple leaves dropped from the canopy above ever fall, are a sign of your dependability. They will nourish the garden that grown in their shade, decomposing in a word derful cycle of life. It's your design, God Your gracious nourishing of us all.

Now, in the late fall, the cycle working its way around once again. The fish has been moved back inside for the winter. The maple leaves are settlike into the pond's modest depths, not yet frozen, but soon to be. The chill of prewinter has settled the mosquitoes into their hiding places to wait for warmth come again.

I took a picture of that iris, Gobecause I knew even then the gift it we from you. When I see it, I remember to gift of slowing down so I can see the I you give me.

Thank you for your overflowing grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pass serves at Luther Seminary as director of developments

ment. She has served as a parish p

tor, editor, teacher and retreat lead

Project for the holidays



Vomen at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Manchester, Mo., use recycled Christmas cards to make ABC books for he congregation's 3-year-olds. The women present the books to the children on the first Sunday of Advent, as a vay to help children prepare for Jesus' coming.



Children from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Manchester, Mo., enjoy the gift of ABC books with colorful art and a two-line poem for each letter of the alphabet. For example, "A is for angels with halos so bright, whose carols were heard that first Christmas night."

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